VAGINAL BLOTTING PAPER

NATHAN

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The Chileans say—half laughing, half serious, as they do—that long ago, when the world was still young and the oceans still smelled of smoke, the dogs decided to go for a swim.

Now, a dog is not afraid of many things—storms, strangers, thunder—but wet tails? Dios mío, that was humiliation itself. To dunk your tail into the Pacific was like a man wandering Santiago without pants: a scandal.

So, before diving in, each dog politely unscrewed its tail (as if it were a bottle cap) and left it on the sand. Imagine the beach that day: hundreds of tails lined up neatly, twitching in the sun like living driftwood.

But the Pacific has a wicked sense of humor. That very afternoon, the earth shook—as it often does in Chile, where the mountains themselves still haven't made up their mind about standing still. The ocean pulled back, gathered its muscles, and came roaring in as a tsunami. Whoosh—away went the tails, tossed like matchsticks into the salt.

When the water calmed and the dogs paddled back to shore, they found nothing where they had left their proud appendages. Only confusion. Only chaos. Tails scattered everywhere, tangled, strangers to their original owners.

Embarrassed to be seen "naked"—for a dog without a tail is like a poet without a metaphor—they grabbed the first one they could and stuck it on. A greyhound might end up with a curly pug's corkscrew. A shepherd might sport the feathery plume of a

setter. A chihuahua could swagger home with something so long it dragged in the dust.

And from that day, the legend says, no dog has ever been sure if the tail it carries is truly its own.

That is why, when two dogs meet, they circle, they pause, and they lower their noses to each other's backside. They are not being rude. They are detectives, searching for their long-lost original tails, hoping one day to swap back what was stolen by the sea.

Nathan had barely buckled his belt when he decided to uncork his social champagne. The attractive lady beside him—sleek hair, book in hand, aura of "please don't"—became his chosen victim. He leaned in, cleared his throat like an amateur priest, and began:

“You know,” Nathan said, eyes twinkling with doom, “the Chileans have a legend about why dogs sniff each other’s butts…”

And off he went, spinning the epic of canine modesty, detachable tails, and tsunamis with the grandiosity of a bard at a dive bar. He waved his hands for the wave, dramatized the dogs’ shame, and delivered the punchline—dogs forever sniffing in search of their lost derrière fashion.

Silence.

The lady blinked twice. Then resumed her book, which had suddenly become the most interesting novel in human history.

Nathan sat back, satisfied and destroyed all at once. Another failed assault on Mount Venus. He sighed.

It was his curse: every time he opened his mouth for anything other than pouring alcohol in, it became

birth control propaganda. Not only effective—perfect. 100% efficiency.

One Nathan story a day keeps the coitus away.

The flight attendant rolled by, asking drinks. Nathan pointed at the tiny bottles of gin. “Better keep my mouth busy with those,” he muttered, “before I ruin another bloodline.”

Nathan had another favorite trick in his lifelong commitment to contraception without condoms: **the star story**. It was carefully designed for maximum pelvic desolation. The ideal setting: lying on a blanket with a girl, meadow, crickets, wine. Romantic perfection. And then Nathan opens his mouth.

> *“You know,” he’d begin, voice soft, eyes squinting toward the heavens, “those stars you see up there? They’re not really there.”*

The girl, if she hadn't already regretted agreeing to this date, would tilt her head, intrigued. Mistake number one. Encouragement.

"They're millions of light years apart. Many of them are galaxies, not stars. And here's the fun part—most of them are probably dead already. Extinct. Kaput. We're just staring at ghosts, embalmed in photons. What you're seeing might not exist anymore, and what exists now, you'll never see. Because light takes too long to get here."

Cue Nathan's dramatic pause, as if he had just dropped the ultimate aphrodisiac.

But no. What he had dropped was a neutron bomb on desire itself. Whatever mood had been cultivated—moonlight, warmth, gentle touching—collapsed into astrophysical frostbite. The girl's womb, which ten seconds earlier might have been at least open to

negotiation, turned into the Atacama Desert overnight.

"Constellations?" Nathan would add with final cruelty. "Total bullshit. Human connect-the-dots. Illusions painted on a void."

And with that, all sexual energy in a hundred-meter radius evaporated. Even the rabbits in nearby bushes paused their mating, mid-thrust, ears drooping.

Nathan stretched, smug in his achievement. "Birth control," he thought, "brought to you by astrophysics."

The captain's voice crackled over the speaker, that bland airline baritone announcing descent. Seatbacks up, tray tables locked, pretend you're civilized for the last twenty minutes.

On Nathan's right sat a man with thick hands and thick eyebrows who promptly drew a shaky cross on himself—forehead, chest, shoulder, shoulder—and then kissed his fingers like he'd just defused a bomb.

Nathan thought it. He *swore* he thought it. But because Nathan's brain was basically a sieve filled with gravel, the thought drained out his mouth unfiltered:

"Oh, great. He crossed himself. Now the whole plane's safe. Thanks, buddy, we owe you one."

The man ignored him—professionally, like a priest ignoring porn on his nephew's laptop. But the rest of the passengers, who had been nervously clutching their armrests and SkyMalls, turned and delivered to Nathan the kind of hate-stares usually reserved for people who kick puppies.

Nathan just smiled, like the bastard he was. He leaned back, turned to the woman beside him—the

poor, beautiful hostage fate had shackled to 18B—and whispered, casual as gin:

“Wanna hear a story about a starry sky?”

Her face crumpled like a paper bag. She reached for the call button, but stopped, realizing there was no parachute option at this altitude.

Nathan cleared his throat, eyes glittering. Somewhere in his mind a condom factory exploded—because once again, his contraception was verbal, free, and brutally effective.

And as soon as the wheels touched tarmat, of course, the applause. Cross man was among the most enthusiastic

The applause died down like a bad song on shuffle, then—because Nathan is an international incident waiting to happen—he shoveled more coal on the engine.

“Those who don't clap twice, your mum's gonna drop dead,” he announced, loud and proud.

For a beat there was polite confusion. Then a woman two rows back—midlife, purse like a small lifeboat—didn’t take chances and smacked her hands together again. “CLAP—CLAP.” It spread like a macabre conga line. Hate stares multiplied, concentrated and lethal: economized widow-makers aimed at 18B.

Nathan grinned. Of course he grinned. He was a walking misstep in human form.

He turned to the woman beside him—the one whose face now resembled a murder plan—and tried on casual for size. “Didn’t clap the first time I heard it. Doesn’t work. Old witch’s still alive.”

Her eyes, which had been politely resigned to awkward small talk, went searching. First stop: the safety card, which looked like a promising blunt instrument. Then the tiny metal coffee stirrer. Then

the economy-class magazine rolled into a threatening cylinder. The flight attendant, sensing escalation, edged nearer with an expression that said both “I will call this in” and “please don’t.”

Nathan realized this was not the flirtation phase. This was the “please kick this man off the plane before he becomes a viral cautionary tale” phase.

He tried to deploy the star story—the old reliable nuclear option of romance-sabotage—but the lady cut him off mid-orbit with a whisper so cold it could be refrigerated: “Shut up. Or I will write a strongly worded text to your mother.”

Nathan attempted a conciliatory smile and produced a hand-mime of offering gin, which somehow made matters worse. She muttered something that might have been a murder weapon wishlist and started scrolling furiously on her phone. The screen lit up; the plane cabin witnessed the birth of a group chat called *Survivors of 18B*.

When the door opened at last, Nathan stood, shoulders casual, swaggering toward the jetway like a man whose crimes were only theoretical. The cross-man? He clapped Nathan on the back with such pious vigor it could have been an exorcism. The woman at Nathan's side shot him one final look—equal parts vengeful and bored—and left without so much as a farewell.

Nathan walked into the arrivals hall alone, chin high, dignity in tatters, and some part of him already composing the next contraceptive anecdote. Outside, the airport tannoy crooned "Fly Me to the Moon." Nathan paused, considered, and then muttered to himself, the one true comfort of his trade: "Perfect. Nobody's having sex on the moon either."

And somewhere, later that week, a group chat called *Survivors of 18B* would compare notes—and Nathan would become a cautionary bedtime tale.

Nathan, Ciudad de México, the connection-that-pretends-to-be-immigration.

Of course, he hated it. Everyone does. Nobody signs up for Kafka roleplay when they only wanted to change planes. But Nathan, being Nathan, decided if he had to walk through this bureaucratic snake pit, he'd at least make it catastrophic.

So he put on his earbuds, phone in his pocket, *and very deliberately forgot to switch off the loudspeaker*. The line at immigration was tense silence: passports out, faces grim, children whining. And then—Nathan's phone, like a drunk mariachi, exploded:

"Nuestro México, febrero 23…"

The corrido about Pershing's Punitive Expedition came blasting out. Ten thousand U.S. soldiers, 600 aeroplanes, chasing Pancho Villa all over the country.

The Mexicans in line twitched. A couple of Americans looked nervously around. Nathan smiled inwardly: this was the good part.

The verse rolled on:

"Los de a caballo no se podían sentar,
y los de a pie no podían caminar,
entonces Villa los pasa en aeroplanos,
y desde arriba les dice *good bye*."

A corrido celebrating Villa mocking Pershing from above, now playing at maximum volume in the immigration hall.

Nathan didn't lower it. Didn't even pretend to fumble. He just let history do what it always does: divide, confuse, provoke. Half the line was muttering *"¡Qué chingados…?"*, the other half humming along.

Nathan leaned toward the lady beside him—the same unfortunate traveling companion from 18B,

dragged into his orbit of doom across borders and skies—and whispered, as if it was the most natural icebreaker in the world:

"You see, every country has its own history. Always contradictory. Always conflictive. Which is *exactly* when I come in. Throw a few rusty bolts into the gears, and see what happens."

The lady closed her eyes. Her wish for a blunt object had now grown into a wish for an airstrike.

And the line moved forward, everyone divided between hating immigration, hating bureaucracy, and hating Nathan—equally, passionately, like a national sport.

The phone blared on, shameless:

"Qué se creían los soldados de Texas,
que combatir era un baile de carquíz,
con la cara llena de vergüenza
se regresaron todos a su país."

That was it. That was the spark. A room full of jet-lagged travelers, corralled in zig-zag ropes, suddenly remembered they were Mexicans, and that Mexicans, when cornered, do not debate—they ignite.

"¡Eso, Villa!" shouted one man in a leather jacket, pumping a fist in the air.
"¡Ay por favor, pura bola de bandoleros!" spat back a lady with a rolling suitcase, who may or may not have had a cousin in the military.
"¡Cállese señora, sin Villa usted ni estaría aquí!"
"¡Y sin Carranza tampoco!"
"¡Carranza era un pinche traidor!"
"¡Tu abuelita traidora!"

It snowballed. Shouts turned into shoves, shoves into kicks, kicks into the kind of chaotic scrapping where nobody even knows what side they're on anymore. One guy screamed "¡Viva Zapata!" just to stir the pot, and three more joined without remembering if Zapata was even in the same war.

Nathan, earbuds in, hands in pockets, watched with anthropological delight. His smile said: "All I did was press play."

By the time airport police charged in—helmets, shields, batons—it was a full-blown **corridor corrido war**. Families clutching children to the side, grandmas shrieking insults older than electricity, one man trying to swing a duty-free tequila bottle like a medieval mace.

"Stop the music!" yelled an officer.
But Nathan, perfectly innocent, raised his palms.
"What music? I'm just… observing history."

The attractive lady beside him, now officially his arch-nemesis, muttered with cold precision:
"I *will* kill you before we reach the baggage claim."

Nathan nodded, satisfied. "Effective birth control, every time."

By baggage claim, the lady had transitioned from "unfortunate beauty in 18B" to "absolute banshee of inconvenience." She had snarled through customs, glared through security, and threatened Nathan with looks that could peel paint. Nathan, naturally, responded with the only logic his brain allowed: sabotage.

He slipped a packet of Argentine yerba mate and another of innocent-but-ominous corn starch into her bag. Contraband? Not at all. But to airport security, white powders in plastic wrap are a dinner bell. Nathan kept these little baggies in his pockets for exactly this purpose: to seed international misunderstandings, the way gardeners seed daisies.

Sure enough, at body scan, her bag lit up like a narco-Christmas tree.
"Señora, acompáñenos."
"What?!" she snapped, voice breaking in three registers.
"This way, por favor."
They led her to the small white room with the metal

table, fluorescent lights, and the endless questions that always begin with *"¿Qué es esto?"* and end with tears, swearing, and a missed connection. She would not be arrested, no—but she would miss a good chunk of her life in that room, answering with increasing fury: *"I don't even drink mate!"*

Nathan, free as a cockroach in a bakery, breezed past, re-cleared the checkpoints, and boarded back onto the very same plane, same crew, same passengers who had endured him the first time. He slumped into his seat, cleared his throat, and half-sang:

"La cucaracha, la cucaracha,
ya no puede caminar,
porque no tiene, porque le falta,
marijuana pa' fumar."

Heads turned. Eyes narrowed. Hate looks gathered like stormclouds. The flight attendants exchanged glances of pure despair. Even the cross-man from

before, freshly crossed again, muttered something about exorcism.

Nathan smiled. Hate was home. He leaned back, adjusted his earpads, and whispered to himself like a lullaby: “Perfect. Nobody in this plane is ever going to get laid again.”

Nathan waited until the needle hit ten thousand feet like a man waiting for the kettle to boil. Seatbelt sign off, people starting to unclip with the cautious optimism of lottery winners—slow, hopeful, slightly delusional. He eased the buckle free, rose, and made for the loo with the casual authority of someone who’s convinced his social crimes are hygienic necessities.

There was a queue. A lone passenger stood by the lavatory door—hands folded, eyes doing the polite-floor tango every human defaults to when trapped in public. The airplane smell: recycled coffee, a faint perfume that tried too hard, and the comforting mechanical whirr that says you’re hurtling through

the sky at lethal speed. They exchanged the ritual: tight, uncomfortable smile; eyes at the carpet; the long, thin silence that pretends civility exists.

Nathan added a garnish.

“Did you bring your own bomb aboard?” he asked, bright and conversational, like offering gum.

The man blinked, genuine confusion creasing his face. “Beg your pardon?”

“Your bomb,” Nathan repeated, leaning in with the helpfulness of a man who reads too many tabloids. “Did you bring it?”

“Excuse me?” the passenger stammered, taken aback between offense and the absurd possibility Nathan was joking.

“You forgot it? Don’t you like to travel safe?” Nathan persisted, the grin widening as if he’d just delivered the punchline to a private audience.

“Sir, I really—” the man began, words evaporating under the fluorescent lights.

“Plane travel 101: always bring your own bomb,” Nathan said, conversationally authoritative. “What’s the chance of having two bombs on the same plane?”

Nearby, the air marshal—compact, stoic, a uniformed suggestion of menace—sat in his jump seat pretending to sleep with textbook stillness. He didn’t flinch. He’d heard that lame line on every single flight. For him it was the same old radio static; for Nathan it was a trophy.

This was not Plane Travel 101. This was something else: “Advanced Methods and Techniques for Pussy-Drying.” A five-hundred–level course, taught in the school of conversational chemical warfare.